

Clarendon Press Series

AN

ETYMOLOGICAL DICTIONARY

OF THE

FRENCH LANGUAGE

CROWNED BY THE FRENCH ACADEMY]

BY

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AUTHOR'S PREFACE.

THIS Etymological Dictionary is the natural sequel to my Historical Grammar. In that work I had traced out the history of French grammatical forms: that I might complete my task, and embrace the full cycle of the history of the language, I was bound to write also a history of its vocabulary. Accordingly, I have endeavoured in this volume to register for general use the results of philological enquiry, hitherto too much confined to a narrow circle of students.

It is not that philological enquiry has been lacking in France during the last three centuries. In the anarchical period of philosophy—the period between the sixteenth century and our day, during which philology was little but a confused mass of erudite errors—two etymological Dictionaries were written, that of Ménage in 1650, and that of Roquefort in 1829. Seven years after the appearance of the latter work the illustrious Frederick Diez published at Bonn the first volume of his Grammar of the Romance Languages (1836), a comparative history of the six languages which have sprung from the Latin, in which he showed by what invariable laws Latin became French, Italian, Spanish, Portugese, Wallachian; and in so doing created a scientific history of the French tongue. Thenceforth French philology was revolutionised; and, just as in the eighteenth century chemistry shook itself free from alchemy, so from this time the study of the French language became a science based on observation¹, the progress of which was destined to be very rapid, under the influence of a spirit of exact investigation: the latest born of experimental sciences, it seemed likely to outstrip them all, except chemistry, in the rapidity and unbroken succession of its discoveries. Every new result is enrolled in its order in the three etymological dictionaries which followed one another at intervals: in 1853 Diez published his *Etymologischer Wörterbuch*; in 1862 appeared M. Chélier's *Dictionary of French Etymology*; in 1863 the first parts of M. Littré's admirable *Dictionary of the French Tongue* came out².

¹ It is but fair to say that a Frenchman, M. Raynouard, had already prepared the way by a comparative study of the six Neo-Latin tongues; still to M. Diez belongs the honour of having created the science by introducing into French philology an exactitude quite unknown before his time.

² This magnificent work was completed in 1873; and an Appendix to it published 1877.

These three works give us all the philological discoveries in the French language during the last thirty years; and the chasm which separates them from the dreams of Méreage and Roquail can only be compared to that which lies between the chemistry of